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FROM USMISSION UNESCO

STATE FOR IO/UNESCO KEVIN PILZ, HENRY HATCH, OES/STAS ANDREW
W. REYNOLDS, OES/OA Liz TIRPAK, OES BARRIE RIPIN
STATE FOR USAID NORMAN RIFKIN
STATE FOR NSC GENE WHITNEY, REBECCA GARDINER
STATE FOR NOAA ARTHUR PATTERSON
STATE FOR EPA
STATE FOR NSF ROSE GOMBAY
STATE FOR HHS Bill Steiger, LIZ YUAN

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SUBJECT: UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE: U.S. WINS POSITIVE
RESULTS ON NORMATIVE ETHICS INSTRUMENTS; OPPORTUNITIES FOR
U.S. LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHTED IN NATURAL SCIENCES

Reftels: A. Paris 4799 B. Paris 6028 C. Paris 5862

1. Summary: In Commission III (social and natural sciences) at UNESCO's 33rd General Conference (GC), the U.S. Delegation registered several important successes relating to social and natural sciences issues, despite a challenging political environment. The adoption by the GC of the Bioethics Declaration without change met U.S. goals for the GC; the document as adopted reflects major successes in defeating provisions harmful to U.S. interests and beliefs. The U.S. Delegation also successfully defeated a proposal to launch a feasibility study on a declaration on a code of conduct for science. (paras 3-6) The General Conference adopted the strategy for establishing a global tsunami warning system approved at the June 2005 Assembly of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. Senior U.S. participation in the Ministerial Round Table on the Basic Sciences successfully conveyed U.S. concern about issues facing developing countries. (paras 7-10)

2. The General Conference adopted a draft resolution outlining the format of the new medium-term strategy (2008-2013) and a drafting process that includes a more active role for member states. Also with an eye to the new medium-term strategy, a resolution was adopted mandating an overall review of the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences sectors. The new medium-term strategy (to be adopted at the 2007 General Conference) is an opportunity to shape UNESCO into the next decade, to turn its focus away from normative instruments and towards programs with lasting impact. (paras 11-12). End Summary.

Social Sciences: Bioethics Declaration Adopted, New Science Ethics Instrument Averted

3. The General Conference adopted the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. No change was made in the document that had been negotiated in June, and this met U.S. goals. The final Declaration is far from perfect, but overall represents a major success. We successfully dodged the bullet on this. At the outset of this process, there was a concerted effort to include the following as bioethical principles (and human rights): "reproductive health care"; respect for all forms of life (with respect for human life downgraded or omitted); protection of the environment; access to health care, clean water, etc.; elimination of poverty; access to new technology, etc. We were able to include in the final document a provision concerning respect for human life (and no reference to reproductive health care) and to turn the other, good things into goals, not rights or ethical principles.

4. At the adoption in Commission III, the U.S. presented a statement of explanation of position which is included in the Annex to the Commission III report as one of the "statements of interpretation of particular provisions." The Record of the Plenary session will include the same statement. The U.S. also was successful in changing the reference in Paragraph 5(b) of the resolution concerning adoption of the Declaration to delete the concept of "implementing" the Declaration; as approved by the Plenary, it reads that the DG will enable the International Bioethics Committee and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee to assist UNESCO in "promoting and disseminating the principles" of the Declaration.

5. The most contentious issue in the Social Sciences field was the proposal advanced by the Social and Human Sciences (SHS) secretariat that the Director General prepare a study on the feasibility of a declaration on a code of conduct for science. A US-backed proposal to replace the feasibility study with assistance to countries in building infrastructure and codes of ethics was ultimately narrowly

defeated. At the Plenary session a compromise was crafted, directing the DG to "reflect" on the issue of ethics and science and to report to the Executive Board in a year.

16. Regarding the Program and Budget for the Social and Human Sciences Sector, the United States was successful in amending Paragraph 03110 (a)(ii) to delete a reference saying that the Social and Human Sciences sector would "develop" principles to guide scientific and technological development and social transformation; it now reads that it will "implement" universal principles. In addition, the U.S. successfully amended several DRs, including changing a reference to policy based rule of law to rule of law more broadly (DR 24); deleting a reference that would ask the Director General to devise policies concerning migration (it now reads he will elaborate a framework for policy development) (DR 25); changing a reference to international organizations introducing a rule of law to restrict it to matters within their competencies, and amending a suggestion that member countries introduce a rule of law against any form of discrimination in all judiciary systems to simply calling for a rule of law (DR 71)

17. Comment: The Director General's call for a pause in the development of normative instruments, his undertaking a review of the natural and social sciences, and his reluctance even to do a feasibility study on a declaration relating to a declaration of ethics in science are indications of the DG's concern about SHS' activities in this area. End Comment.

Natural Sciences: Opportunities to Enhance Positive U.S. Profile at UNESCO, and Beyond

18. On the agenda of Commission III (Natural and Social Sciences), the Natural Sciences issue of most importance to the U.S. was the strategy for establishing a global tsunami warning system approved at the June 2005 IOC Assembly (REF A). In addition, Commission III approved six new category II centers, as well as proposals for an International Year of Planet Earth and an International Astronomy Year. Regarding the latter, U.S. delegation sought and received assurances that the Year would be financed by extrabudgetary funds, and planned in consultation with the UN Outer Space Agency (UNOOSA).

19. Presidential Science Advisor Marburger chaired the first session of the UNESCO Roundtable on the Basic Sciences, setting the tone for the debate. NSF Director Bement also participated. The debate was an opportunity to explore best practices and formulate recommendations on the role of the basic sciences in sustainable development. The resulting communique underlined specific means of enhancing science education and capacity building; our expectation is that these can be taken into account in the drafting of the new medium-term strategy (see paras below).

110. Comment: The Natural Sciences Sector of UNESCO offers many opportunities. The work of the IOC in disaster mitigation and earth observation systems is central to U.S. interests. Many of the category II centers discussed and approved by the General Conference -- particularly the Dundee Center on water law and policy and the Kobe center on water hazards mitigation are also pertinent and will help ensure that UNESCO programs have impact in developing countries. The participation of Drs. Marburger and Bement in the Ministerial Roundtable on Basic Sciences conveyed U.S. concern about issues facing developing countries.

111. However, even the Natural Sciences sector is given to launching an abundance of centers and of international years, which if not implemented strategically, represent a dispersal of UNESCO's resources in areas that may have little impact. But the medium-term strategy, and in particular the review of the Science Programs (below) offers the opportunity to shape the future course of this key sector in a positive way. This will help the organization as a whole resist the temptation to invest its efforts in normative instruments and in unproductive programs. End Comment.

Medium-Term Strategy: An Chance to Sharpen UNESCO's Focus

112. At the General Conference, there was consensus in favor of a resolution co-drafted and co-sponsored by the U.S. that set the format and procedure to be followed in drafting the next medium-term strategy (REFS B). The aim of the resolution is to ensure that member states take a pro-active role in the process; for the U.S., this presents an opportunity to enhance UNESCO's focus on programs, rather than on normative instruments. That resolution was discussed and approved by all of the GC program commissions as well as in plenary.

113. Also in connection with the Medium-Term Strategy,

Commission III approved a resolution to "launch an overall review of (the Natural Sciences and Social and Human Sciences sectors) against the background of UNESCO's mandate, country and regional priorities and today's global needs, which would form an integral part of and contribute to program planning." (REF C) Though many member states, including the U.S., were in favor, the Secretariat resisted, citing budgetary restrictions. In the end, 120,000 dollars was found to fund the study, with a plea for extra-budgetary funds. In response to the resolution, the DG announced in plenary his plan "to set up a working group headed by DDG Barbosa and consisting of senior Secretariat officials and external experts, to prepare a report for the Executive Board." At an informal October 18 meeting organized by the resolution's sponsors, they said that they would meet with Barbosa to seek clarification on how the DG's panel would operate and to urge him to include appropriate outside experts in the review panel. At this point, there is no definitive word on the composition of the panel. With regard to the Social and Human Sciences Division, the exercise is likely to consider the nature of the activities conducted by SHS and the leadership of the sector. Oliver